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ABSTRACT

In theory, the Chinese Communist press is required to engage in criticism of other institutions and of Party or government bureaucrats through its news coverage and self-criticism of its own mistakes in response to criticism from readers. In practice, Party control of the press prevents any effective criticism or self-criticism. Basically, the newspapers must follow the party line, usually criticizing policies and factions now out of favor. Ideological error in such criticism can even result in the death of journalists. Even though newspapers are now much livelier and carry more critical reports than they did during the drab Cultural Revolution years, their freedom in news coverage and criticism is as precarious as before. In conclusion, criticism and self-criticism do serve some functions, mostly of distribution control, but these are far outweighed by their dysfunctions. Although from a macro-sociological perspective the Communist Chinese Press performs the same system maintenance function as the western press, its control by the Party prevents it from effectively fulfilling this function. (JL)

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# Press Criticism and Self-Criticism in Communist China

## An Analysis of Its Ideology, Structure, and Operation

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# PRESS CRITICISM AND SELF-CRITICISM IN COMMUNIST CHINA

## An Analysis of Its Ideology, Structure, and Operation

All social systems have some kind of control mechanism to check deviance. In a country like the United States, this mechanism is built in in the division of power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and supplemented by the self-designated "watchdog" function performed by the mass media (Note 1). However, in a country like the Soviet Union or Communist China, where demarcation among the three governing branches is not only blurred but also subsumed under the supreme leadership of the Communist Party (Note 2), this mechanism is assigned to the Party disciplinary committee and to the mass media. Known as "criticism and self-criticism," in which the media criticize the Party or government bureaucrats or practices and engage in self-criticism of their own conduct, this mechanism helps maintain Party discipline and social order by communicating to the Party members and the masses the normative requirements and feeding general social conditions back to the Party.

Though criticism and self-criticism is practiced by all, the media's role is important in that they serve as a channel through which the masses participate in social control publicly. Furthermore, exposing Party or government cadres' wrongs in the media, rather than or in addition to internal Party meetings, exerts social pressures on the deviants.

Important as it is, this mechanism has not received enough research attention. Inkeles and Geiger were perhaps the first to study it, through content analysis of letters to the editor in Russian newspapers (Note 3). Other studies on mass media in the Soviet Union have also discussed it, but the general focus has been on letter contents and on the manifest or latent functions of this mechanism as in the form of letters to the editor (Note 4).

Following the approach of Inkeles, Yu has analyzed the Chinese Communist mass media. In spite of his work's comprehensiveness, the criticism and self-criticism mechanism was not systematically analyzed in depth (Note 5). Though it was later examined by Chu and Chu, the focus was again on structures of letter content and letter writers, and on the letters column as a channel for conflict resolution and/or tension release (Note 6). While these studies do help greatly in understanding the operation of the press in Communist countries, the concept under scrutiny has been taken uncritically as it is given in the Communist ideology and structure. As a result, many questions have been left unanswered. The present paper will approach this concept "critically" (Note 7), in the sense that the philosophical and institutional assumptions underlying this mechanism will be examined.

## The Function Defined

"Criticism and self-criticism" (piping yu tsewo piping) comes from Soveit Russia's "kritika i samokritika." It is a practice the Communist Party utilizes to criticize the wrongs of others and of itself. As a political ritual, it is practiced in Party sessions and in various group sessions organized for the masses as well (Note 8). Activities of criticism and self-criticism in general will intensify during political and social movements, be they for thought reform or for "sparrow killing" (Note 9). The practice of criticism and self-criticism is also evidenced in the press's criticism of other social institutions and Party or government bureaucrats through its news coverage, editorial comments, and letters column. In addition to criticism, the press engages in self-criticism as well, through examination of its own mistakes and responding to the criticism by its readers. As all the press in China is owned and operated by the Communist Party, criticism of the Party itself, to people both within and without the Party, constitutes self-criticism too. Furthermore, when criticism of a person or institution is decided by the Party as justified, this person or institution will be required to make a self-criticism as

well, thus, completing the performance of this ritual. This assumption has led to the treatment of criticism and self-criticism as one single unified mechanism.

Modelling their political structure after that of Soviet Russia, the Chinese Communists have long realized the importance of criticism and self-criticism. Way back in 1945, when they were still in the Yenan caves, Mao Tse-tung wrote:

> Conscientious practice of self-criticism is still another hallmark that distinguishes our Party from all other political parties. As we say, dust will accumulate if a room is not cleaned regularly, our faces will get dirty if they are not washed regularly. Our comrades' minds and our Party's work may also collect dust, and also need sweeping and washing. The proverb "Running water is never stale and a door-hinge is never worm-eaten" means that constant motion prevents the inroads of germs and other organisms (Note 10).

In fact, even during these years of war with the Nationalist army, criticism and self-criticism was used extensively to eradicate "unhealthy thoughts" in the Party (Note 11).

The establishment of the Communist regime in 1949 by no means downplayed this mechanism's importance. On the contrary, in April, 1950, barely six months after the promulgation of the People's Republic, the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee adopted a resolution calling for the promotion of criticism and self-criticism of "all mistakes and weaknesses in our work." Even then, the Party was concerned that its latest military victory might one day lead to corruption, which in turn would handicap the construction of a new China. The Resolution firmly stated:

> It is very important to induce the masses to criticize the shortcomings in our work, and to educate Party members, especially Party cadres, to carry out self-criticism. Because now the civil war on the mainland is over, and our Party is already the leading political power, arrogant attitudes can easily arise. We will be poisoned by bureaucracy and prevented from accomplishing the task of building New China, if we cannot exercise criticism and

> self-criticism in an open and timely way . . . . This must be done with respect to all mistakes and shortcomings in our work, at all public occasions, and especially in the newspapers and periodicals (Note 12).

In operation, criticism and self-criticism is one of the five functions the press is assigned to perform (Note 13). First, just like in any other organizations, it is practiced in the various meetings within a news organization. Second, it is evidenced in the news coverage or editorial comments organized by a news organization. In theory, all departments of a newspaper may organize such articles that fall within their domain. Third, this function is executed in the "letters columns" of a newspaper (Note 14). Through these letters, under the charge of the "Mass Work Department" (chuntsong kungtso pu) of a newspaper, the press publishes criticism of itself or any other bureaucrats and practices. Of chief concern to the present analysis is the latter two forms, though both are treated in terms of generality rather than their detailed contents.

## Ideological and Structural Foundation

As Communist China is built on Marxism-Leninism, understanding of criticism and self-criticism would not be complete without a concomitant grasp of the Marxist's basic tenet of class struggle. In Marxist analysis, class struggle is the moving force of social progress. All classes are forever struggling to dominate the others (Note 15). The press, as a weapon for class struggle, is therefore class-oriented, always serving the ruling class. In a Communist country, the ruling class being the proletariat, the press is regarded as in its service and representing the welfare of the people and the society. On the other hand, in a capitalist country, being ruled by the bourgeois, the press serves the interests of this bourgeois class (Note 16). Closely related to class struggle, the Marxist tenet of dialectic materialism forms the basis of Chinese Communist ideology. On this dialectic are developed the philosophy of "democratic centralism" and that of contradictions in society. It is in this context

that the mechanism of criticism and self-criticism is to be understood.

According to Mao's analysis, "democratic centralism" is what distinguishes a Communist country from a bourgeois country. The practice of democratic centralism ensures freedom and discipline simultaneously. Democracy is for the Party and for the people and it is centralized in the Party's leadership. Mao explained:

> Within the ranks of the people, democracy is correlative with centralism and freedom with discipline. They are two opposites of a single entity, contradictory as well as united, and we should not one-sidedly emphasize one to the exclusion of the other. Within the ranks of the people, we cannot do without freedom, nor can we do without centralism. This unity of democracy and centralism, of freedom and discipline, constitutes our democratic centralism (Note 17).

Though this remark was made a quarter of a centruy ago, it is still the fundamental guiding ideology for the execution of criticism and self-criticism. In September 1979 at a theory (ideological) class at the Central Party School, Hu Chi-wei, editor-in-chief of the People's Daily and China's foremost ideological theorist on journalism, reiterated that grasp of democratic centralism is the key to the full execution of this mechanism (Note 18).

Following Marx's conflict approach to social problems, the Chinese Communist ideology distinguishes two kinds of contradictions: "those between ourselves and the enemy and those among the people themselves." The former, according to Mao, are antagonistic and the latter, non-antagonistic. Being different in nature, these two contradictions are resolved by different methods. Mao said:

> Towards the enemy, it uses the method of dictatorship, that is, for a long period of time as it is necessary, it does not permit them to take part in political activity and compels them to obey the law of the people's government, to engage in labor, and, through such labor, be transformed into new men. Towards the people, on the contrary, it was the method of democracy, not of compulsion, . . . to educate and persuade. Such education is self-education for the people, and its basic method is criticism and self-criticism (Note 19).

Thus, in dealing with contradictions within the people, criticism and self-criticism is to be practiced in the spirit of "unity - criticism - unity." In Mao's words, the purpose of criticism is to "cure sickness and rescue people" and to achieve a new unity. Thus, the ultimate goal of criticism is not to embarrass or revenge someone but to solve problems. Thus, constructive criticism is advocated and destructive criticism is opposed. To fulfill this requirement, several principles must be observed. These are the Party's theory, line, directives, policy and discipline; state statutes; the Party's tradition and work style; and the law of objectivity (Note 20).

To put democratic centralism into practice and to "correctly handle the contradictions among the people," the Communist Party assumes the leadership. "Our centralism is a system built upon democratic foundation. Proletarian centralization is a kind of centralization founded on a wide democratic basis. The Party committees at the various levels are the units in charge of this centralized leadership" (Note 21). To ensure the Party's leadership, China's media network is closely linked to her administrative and Party organizations. Each administrative level has a corresponding Party committee, which makes decisions and supervises the day-to-day routines (Note 22). In overseeing the operation of the press, the Party propaganda secretary at each level in the hierarchy supervises criticism and self-criticism as well. The Party's leadership in this is considered "the basic principle that cannot be changed" (Note 23).

In theory, leadership by the Party is to guarantee that "correct criticism from the mass of the Party members and from the mass of the people will receive the Party's support" even though such criticism may contain "only a dearth of accuracy." Furthermore, press criticism of the Party's mistakes is a "political matter," which, being "important and complicated," only the Party is capable of handling (Note 24).

The Party's leadership is also to prohibit criticism for criticism's sake. As the aim of criticism is to achieve the "greatest results possible," questions concerning whom, what, when, and how to criticize have to be

resolved first. The Party makes such decisions as the timing or priority of criticism, whether the criticized is to be named or not, whether the criticism is to be conducted "internally" or publicly in the press. All these questions are too important to be left to others than the Party (Note 25). Criticism of high-ranking cadres is perhaps the most important issue that can only be and must be decided by the party. Hu Chi-wei said:

> On the question of cirticizing responsible cadres, I once told comrades at the newspapers that responsible cadres are after all different from the ordinary cadres. If responsible cadres or high-ranking cadres have made certain mistakes in their work, because of their high position and great responsibility. The mistakes will have greater consequences. Whether appropriate or not, criticism of their mistakes will also have greater consequences. The handling of criticism of high-ranking cadres who have committed mistakes is always linked to the whole situation. To resolve a problem concerning the situation requires the Party committee making the decision. The newspaper cannot make the decision without the Party committee. The newspaper may make the decision first, but it must still consult the Party committee. The Party newspaper cannot act for the Party committee. It is only the Party's assistant, a propaganda and opinion tool under its leadership . . . . The newspaper cannot desist from the Party committee's leadership. It cannot criticize whomever it wants to. If it should do this, it would desist from the Party committee and would be a violation of the Party discipline (Note 26).

The Party discipline Hu referred to is specifically stipulated in Article 8 of the Chinese Communist Party Constitution: "All the Party must obey the discipline of democratic centralism: the individual obeys the organization; the minority obey the majority; the lower levels obey the upper levels; and the whole Party obeys the Central (Committee)" (Note 27).

Hu's remarks were made in September 1979, but the gist can be traced back to the very first document of April 1950 setting the basic guideline for criticism and self-criticism in China's press and to the various other documents reiterating the Party's determination to carry out this mechanism -- during the Hundred Flowers Movement of the 1950s, the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, and the anti-Lin Piao and anti-Confucius

campaign of the early 1970s, as well as the campaign denouncing the "Gang of Four" since Mao's death in 1976 (Note 28).

The above discusssion shows that the concept of "democratic centralism" and the two different methods for dealing with different types of contradictions contain serious fallacies. First, "democracy and centralism" and "freedom and discipline" are contradictory in themselves. The distinction between "the people" and the "enemy" is defined conceptually and not operationally. Practice in the past three decades has shown that even the Party, which is supposed to make all important decisions in criticism and self-criticism, was not able to make a clear distinction. As a result, the mechanism was turned into a tool for faction fights. The purge of many Chinese leaders, including Liu Shao-chi, China's president in the sixties, and Teng Hsiao-ping, as well as the current condemnation of the "Gang of Four," the leaders of the Cultural Revolution, all point to the weakness of this mechanism's ideological and structural foundation.

As can be seen, this mechanism is easily susceptible to abuse by whoever is in power, simply because the Party secretaries are required by the Party Constitution to obey their superiors. Once the Party, represented by the persons holding power, makes a decision to criticize or praise someone or some practice, the results will sweep the country. This is exactly why Liu Shao-chi, who had been condemned as "traitor, scab and renegade" for more than ten years, is now once again "a great revolutionary leader." The case of the "Gang of Four" is equally illustrious. Once the four were designated as the "enemies of the people," they have been criticized and in fact condemned in the media, just as Liu or Teng or other Chinese leaders had experienced before or during the Cultural Revolution. The rationale is simple indeed: whoever possesses the power decides whom or what to criticize and praise.

Structurally, criticism and self-criticism, as a duty of the press, is to be executed under the Party's leadership on the assumption that the Party is capable of making all correct decisions and guiding the course of the country's programs. The irony lies in that the Party not only calls for the press to support its programs but also requires the press to

criticize its mistakes, suggesting that the Party is not infallible. The fact that the distinction between what to praise and what to criticize is blurred and confusing further contributes to the failure of press criticism and self-criticism.

In ideology, criticism and self-criticism is regarded only as a good tradition of the Party, a working style. It is not institutionalized or codified into law to guarantee its independence. Instead, its execution is totally dependent upon the Party committees at various levels, which decide whom, what, when and how to criticize. Sans structural autonomy, worsened by the absence of an independent judicial branch, it is bound to abuses. To play "safe," the press has chosen to extoll the achievements of the Party instead since it is after all its duty too.

In sum, the Chinese Communists, like Marxists elsewhere and throughout the time, hold firmly to the eternal infallability of their ideology. They insist that theirs, as an expression of the proletariat, has neither privilege nor interests to protect. Thus, all activities in the society, be they symbolic or materialistic transanctions, are to be under the Communist leadership. Organizations and institutions are thus established to carry out the Party's decisions, never to question them except for clarification of goals or means. Press criticism and self-criticism is also cast in this context. It is never meant to be such as is generally understood in a non-Communist country. It is but a measure to help the Party implement its policies. This is exactly where the paradox lies.

## The Mechanism in Operation

Though only in recent years did the Chinese Communist press publicly admit the failure of criticism and self-criticism, weaknewsses were in fact showing in the early years of the People's Republic (Note 29). As is now officially acknowledged, erosion of Party discipline began in the anti-rightist campaign of 1959 (Note 30). Criticism and self-criticism, though active and visible throughout the past thirty years, has been anything but working to the benefit of the Party or the society. The ordeal of Shanghai's

Wen Hui Pao serves as a typical example, both on the institutional and individual levels in capsuling the complete experience of the Communist Chinese press (Note 31).

As told by Hsu Chu-cheng, founder of Wen Hui Pao in 1937, press freedom has never existed in the People's Republic. During the early fifties, Wen Hui Pao had to literally "copy" whatever the People's Daily did, in writing style as well as in layout. As a result, Wen Hui Pao, a popular and independent newspaper before 1949, had to cease publication in 1956 because of shrinking circulation. It did not resume publication until a year later when Hsu was urged by the Communist Party to join the Hundred Flowers Movement to criticize and to voice opinions. Though Wen Hui Pao and other newspapers responded with enthusiasm and had received Mao's personal complement for having done a good job, yet, when the tide was reversed, the paper was severely criticized by the People's Daily and other newspapers. Even Mao himself wrote several editorials for the People's Daily to denounce Wen Hui Pao and Hsu Chu-cheng (Note 32). Hsu was labelled a "rightist" and the paper had to make a self-criticism and was reorganized under the complete control of the Communist Party. Hsu himself was subjected to subsequent cirticism and repudiation during the Cultural Revolution as well and was not politically rehabilitated until June 1980.

Wen Hui Pao's docility, however, was no guarantee of a better treatment. When Mao Tse-tung launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Wen Hui Pao, like all other newspapers throughout the country, responded with vigor. However, like many other newspapers and Party bureaucrats, it once again fell victim to Mao's plot. Wen Hui Pao was not supporting the right faction. The paper had to confess and criticize its mistakes, but only after it had been taken over by the radical faction (Note 33). In the 50's, Wen Hui Pao had to "copy" the People's Daily. Now that it had become the "flagship" of the radical faction under Chiang Ching's leadership, its importance far surpassed that of the People's Daily, the Party Central Committee's official organ. Until the downfall of Chiang Ching and her associates in 1976, all other newspapers had to look upon Wen Hui Pao,

instead of the People's Daily, for ideological inspiration and editorial guidance.

Just as the newspapers had been criticizing themselves for failure to follow the correct line during the Cultural Revolution, China's newspapers in the post-Mao years have been criticizing themselves for having subjected themselves to the Gang of Four during the Cultural Revolution. Articles after articles and letters after letters in the press confessed that the press had lied to the people and done harm to the people and the Party. Articles after articles also vowed to revive the Party's tradition of criticism and self-criticism and to tell the truth (Note 34). As the Gang's headquarters during the Cultural Revolution, Wen Hui Pao was by no means exempt from this ritual when the Gang was purged after Mao's death in 1976.

What these instances have told us is that criticism and self-criticism, being restrained ideologically and structurally, can do little but follow the line as decided by whoever is in power. Though active and visible, it is either on non-policy matters or on petty grievances. Should a newspaper, without the backing of a powerful faction, step beyond the dominant policy line, it is bound to end up in self-criticism and its leaders removed or purged. As a result, Chinese journalists, be they Communists or not, have suffered. Many even had to pay with their lives. For instance, Teng To, editor-in-chief of the People's Daily, was persecuted to death (Note 35). The tragedy is that these journalists or newspapers have no way to guarantee their safety whether or not they follow the official line because the critical final decision has nothing to do with right or wrong but rather depends on the outcome of power struggle within the Party. Being a tool of the Party, the press cannot but be victimized.

As a result of the disastrous damages of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist press, and many other institutions, have done some soul searching. Though newspapers, in comparison with the drab Cultural Revolution years, are now much livelier and have carried more critical letters and news reports (Note 36), their freedom in news coverage and in criticism

is as precarious as before. Three cases will be cited for illustration.

In early 1979, China's post-Mao new leadership under Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping launched a campaign on "practice as the sole criterion for varification of truth." As expected, the media joined the discussion and extrapolation of the theme. However, one publication was absent in this discussion. It was none other than China's most important ideological journal, the Red Flag. Why? As in the above-mentioned cases, Red Flag was under the control of a faction differing in ideology and policy from Teng Hsiao-ping. The discussion campaign on "practice as the sole criterion for verification of truth" was nothing but part of an overall plot to discredit and de-power this faction. Only after the leader of this faction was purged and the journal editor-in-chief replaced, did Red Flag confess its mistakes and join the discussion (Note 37).

On November 25, 1979, an off-shore oil rig in Po Hai Bay was dashed while it was being towed during a storm. The incident resulted in the death of 72 people and loss or damage to considerable property. In our judgment, this would be news. Something went wrong and the responsible cadres should be criticized. However, it took more than eight months for the Chinese press to report and criticize this incident. The delay had nothing to do with the Chinese journalists' competence. Nor did it have to do with cover-up by the news source. In fact, reporters had been dispatched to the scene. Still, nothing had been reported until July 22, 1980, when the People's Daily and the Worker's Daily broke the ice. The incident, involving deaths, damages, and the petroleum ministry, was simply too important for the journalists to decide upon. Without specific instruction from the Party Central, the journalists were immobilized. In retrospect, one reporter wrote:

> It seems that the newsworthiness of an event . . . oftentimes does not depend on the event itself. Nor does it depend on the ability of the reporters or editors. Rather, it depends on the leadership's approval (Note 38).

A reporter of Tientsin Daily also shared this view:

> The "Po Hai No. 2" incident occurred in Tientsin. But Tientsin Daily did not report it until much later. Even after the Central level newspapers had been conspicuously covering, we still lagged far behind the situation. Did we not know that such an important incident had happened at all? Certainly this was not the case. Reporters were dispatched to the scene shortly after. But after some preliminary understanding of the situation, we came to this conclusion: This was an incident of tremendous importance. So many people were killed and the Petroleum Ministry was involved. Since the Central and the Municipal Party Committee had not issued any directives, we never thought of making it public (Note 39).

Caution is certainly needed in news reporting and in criticism and self-criticism. On November 4, 1980, a reporter at a broadcasting station in China's northern-most province Heilungkiang was removed from his post for having broadcast several articles originally published in the People's Daily, Peking Daily and Liberation Army Daily. Broadcasting articles in these central level newspapers is part of the duty of a local reporter. But all these articles criticized bureaucratism and supported the abolishment of life-term cadre system. Since the reporter's superiors, members of the Party committee, did not like these articles and were opposed to what was being advocated, they dismissed the reporter. The reporter appealed the case to the prefecture (ti-chu) Party committee, which not only reconfirmed the dismissal decision but also further criticized the reporter for his interference with the leadership's work. Only after the People's Daily had intervened was the decision rectified (Note 40).

The three cases, and many others reported in the Chinese press, indicate that criticism and self-criticism has become a victim of faction fights and individual moral fallacies. As a form of spontaneous expression of opinions and comments, it is limited in too many ways. A look at the procedure for handling criticism letters to the editor and criticism articles will further illuminate this mechanism's operation.

Letters to the editor, like the press's criticism articles, serve as

an important channel through which the Communist leaders establish an understanding of the masses' feelings and opinions. Theoretically, this has always been the Party's major concern, no matter who is in power. A commentary in the October 1971 issue of Red Flag said:

> Letters by the people are the best research materials. They provide information you don't hear around conference tables, nor can you get it in written reports. They are important sources of references for leaders at the various levels to enable them to grasp the overall situation and coordinate their work (Note 41).

Based on this assumption, both the press and the leaders are required to pay close attention to these letters. While the newspapers at all levels have their respective "letters column," its publication is irregular, subject to the political tides of a particular period. For instance, during the Hundred Flowers Movement, the number of letters received and published was enormous. But once massive counter-criticism was organized in the press against over-criticism in these letters, they disappeared altogether (Note 42). During the Cultural Revolution, when power struggles were fought, letters "from" the masses simply became weapons of the factions, or, they were not published at all. Even after the consolidation of power by the radical faction under Chiang Ching, letters appeared only infrequently, either expressing petty personal grievances or criticizing some widespread practices in which almost everyone was involved and yet no one could be held responsible. In post-Mao years, though far more criticism letters were being received by and published in the press, the basic pattern remained the same, despite repeated directives from the Party Central calling for more criticism and warning against reprisals (Note 43).

As revealed in the People's Daily, when a criticism letter is received, the editors should check the authenticity of the complaint. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the matter, the editors may or may not refer the letter to the unit concerned. If they do, the unit concerned should prepare a response, which may or may not be published in the press. Oftentimes, this decision is made by the Party committee of

the involved unit. If disputes should arise between the press and the unit, the letter will be forwarded to a higher unit for resolution (Note 44). This handling procedure is exactly where the problem lies. China Reconstructs, an English-language propaganda magazine, reported (October 1978) that during the early seventies a young worker was sentenced to 15 years in prison for writing a letter critical of Chiang Ching, Chang Chun-chiao and Yao Wen-yuan, then China's central leadership core. This same article also revealed that in March 1976 alone more than 50 letters were forwarded to the police or to those whom the criticism was directed at (Noted 45).

Certainly, the Gang of Four has been removed and convicted and the new leadership is more tolerant of criticism than its predecessor. But, the ideological and structural setup, characterized by the absence of independent protection from abuses of power, has made China's journalists doubly cautious in handling criticism. The afore-mentioned Hsu Chu-cheng said:

> An odd phenomenon is that the People's Daily seems to be more liberal. As it is the Party's mouthpiece, representing the Party Central, we would expect it to be the most restrained. But, it is the most liberal newspaper. (This is because) all other newspapers do not have the kind of gut and support editor-in-chief of the People's Daily, Hu Chi-wei, has. Thus, the newspapers in Shanghai or elsewhere, including those in Hong Kong, are all inferior to the People's Daily because they are subject to far more frequent criticism. A telephone call or a word from the Director of the Propaganda Department, or an official of a lower rank than that, would be enough to scare the hell out of the editor (Note 46).

Hsu is no maverick; many other Chinese journalists have echoed his observations (Note 47).

## Conclusion and Discussion

This paper has documented the failure of the Chinese Communist press's criticism and self-criticism function. This, however, is no gainsaying that criticism and self-criticism serves no functions at all (Note 48). What this paper has attempted to demonstrate is that this control mechanism's dysfunctions have far out-weighed its functions. Being restricted ideologically and structurally, spontaneous criticism and self-criticism of crucial matters cannot be practiced. This is exactly why such radical and unpopular policies as adopted during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution were then receiving overwhelming support rather than criticism. As discussed in the previous pages criticism of these policies did not and could not come about without drastic shifts in the leadership. Thus, we see constant denials of the past. The damages, as the Chinese Communist leaders now admit, are "disastrous." The experience of criticism and self-criticism is but another example where subjective intentions and objective consequences simply do not meet (Note 49).

The Chinese Communist leaders and the country's journalists have been contemplating on this dilemma. Some have suggested a reform of the press system; others, a change in the press's operational procedures; still others, the promulgation of a press law to protect the journalists; . . . (Note 50). But, these are cautious ones and all fall within the current predominant ideology and policy. What has not been questioned or examined but still been firmly upheld is the ideological and structural insistence on democratic centralism and the supreme leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (Note 51). As the experience of the past thirty years shows, short of a basic ideological and structural change, the press will continue to be at the mercy of whoever is in power. If the leaders are liberal, within the bounds of Communist ideology, the press will be too; if they are heavy-handed, so will the press. When and how China is going to make a breakthrough still remains to be seen.

From a macro-sociological perspective, the Chinese Communist press functions no differently from its Western counterpart in terms of its

contribution to system maintenance (Note 52). However, the similarity ceases to exist when we compare the actual operation of the two press systems. In a Western country, though ideologically the press is conceived of being capable of performing the social control function, it assumes this duty all by its own. It alone makes such decisions independently as to whom, what, when and how to criticize, only subject to spontaneous clashes of social forces. Few institutional restraints other than those from the press organization itself are imposed on its operation. The self-righting process is the key to the balance. In contradistinction, the press in Communist China is not only ideologically conceived as capable of performing this social control function -ut also institutionally assigned to perform it under the leadership and supervision of the Communist Party. Though clashes of social forces also exist in a Communist country, they are regulated by the Party, as represented by whoever is in power, and manifested in factional differences. They are not regulated by an independent legal institution. Thus, press criticism and self-criticism in a Communist country is a social mechanism under tight harness. To what extent it operates depends not on the press itself but on the dominant power in the Party. If the dominant power holder wants authentic criticism, the press will respond likewise, subject to esoteric resistance from the factions and from individuals. On the other hand, if the dominant power wants praise and not criticism, the press will so respond too.

In terms of system maintenance, the Chinese Communist press system is perhaps fairly strong in distribution control but rather weak in feedback control (Note 53). Yet, because of constant and drastic shifts in policies and interpretations of ideologies in the past three decades, this strength in distribution control has turned out to be the system's very weakness. Though lack of systematically collected data has forbidden us from making any specific assertion in this regard, failure of press criticism and self-criticism, as well as the Chinese press accounts of a confidence crisis, seems to suggest that this may be very much so (Note 54).

## Notes

1. Edmund B. Lambeth, "The Watchdog Ethics of the Press," Quarterly Journal of Ideology, 1:3 (Spring 1977) pp. 8-14; Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 1956); William Hocking, Freedom of the Press (Chicago, Il.: University of Chicago Press, 1947). Though this paper deals with the Chinese press only, generalization to other media is self-evident.

2. Lucian W. Pye, "Communication and Political Culture in China;" A. Doak Barnett, "The Communications Systems in China: Some Generalizations, Hypotheses, and Questions for Research;" in Godwin C. Chu & Francis L. K. Hsu, eds. Moving a Mountain: Cultural Change in China (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), pp. 153-178, 386-395, respectively.

3. Alex Inkeles and Kent Geiger, "Critical Letters to the Editors of the Soviet Press: Areas and Modes of Complaint," American Sociological Review, 17:6 (December 1952), pp. 694-703; Inkeles and Geiger, "Critical Letters to the Editors of the Soviet Press: Social Characteristics and Inter-relations of Critics and the Criticized," American Sociological Review, 18:1 (February 1953), pp. 12-22.

4. Gayle Durham Hollander, Soviet Political Indoctrination: Development in Mass Media and Propaganda since Stalin (N.Y.: Praeger, 1972), pp. 39, 44-47; Mark W. Hopkins, Mass Media in the Soviet Union (N.Y.: Praeger, 1970), pp. 33-34, 41-42; Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 194-222.

5. Frederick T. C. Yu, Mass Persuasion in Communist China (N.Y.: Praeger, 1964), passim; Franklin W. Houn's In Change a Nation: Propaganda and Indoctrination in Communist China (N.Y.: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961) touches upon this mechanism only in passing. Richard H. Solomon's "Communication Patterns and the Chinese Cultural Revolution," in The China Quarterly, No. 32 (October-December 1967), pp. 101-110, examines criticism as a process of interpersonal communication.

6. Godwin C. Chu and Leonard L. Chu, "Parties in Conflict: Letters to the Editor of the People's Daily," Journal of Communication, 31:4 (Fall 1981), pp. 74-91; Godwin C. Chu, Radical Change through Communication in Mao's China (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1978), pp. 238-242.

7. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "Administrative and Critical Communication Research," in P. F. Lazarsfeld, ed. Qualitative Analysis (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1972).

8. For examples of criticism and self-criticism in groups, see Martin King Whyte, Small Groups and Political Rituals in China (Berkeley: University of California, 1974).

9. Yu, op. cit., pp. 53, 97.

10. Mao Tse-tung, "On Coalition Government," in Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 3 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 316. All translations in this paper, except those of Mao's quotes, are my own unless they are otherwise indicated.

11. Yu, op. cit., p. 50.

12. The Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, "Resolutions on the Promotion of Criticism and Self-criticism in Newspapers and Periodicals." Adopted on April 19, 1950. Reprinted in News Front (December 1979), pp. 2-3. Translation is based on Lynn T. White, III, "Local Newspapers and Community Change, 1949-1969," in Moving a Mountain, p. 81.

13. The other four functions are "organizing, propelling, encouraging and instigating." White, op. cit., p. 86.

14. The People's Daily, for instance, has ten departments: editorial, theoretical (ideological) propaganda, industry, rural villages, national politics, science and education, literature and art, reporters, international, and mass work (handling letters). See "An Exchange Talk at the People's Daily," Journey to Peita (Peking University), Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Peita Exchange Visit Group, 1979), p. 40.

15. Lewis Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought, 2nd ed. (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977), pp. 48-50, for brief discussion of Marx's class theory.

16. Yu Chi-chun, "On the Nature and Duty of the Newspaper after the Whole Party's Work Priorities Have Been Changed," in Collections of Journalistic Treaties, No. 1 (Peking: Chinese People's University Press, 1980), p. 3.

17. Mao Tse-tung, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People, (February 27, 1957)," in Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), p. 389.

18. Hu Chi-wei, "How to Promote Criticism and Self-criticism in the Press," News Front (December 1979), pp. 4-17.

19. Mao, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," p. 392.

20. Hu Chi-wei, "Treat and Study Press Criticism as an Academic Question," News Front (December 1980), p. 15.

21. Hu, "How to Promote Criticism and Self-criticism in the Press," p. 4.

22. Alan P. L. Liu, Communications and National Integration in Communist China, rev. ed. (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1975), Chapter 4, pp. 34-86.

23. Hsiung Fu, "Promote Correct Criticism and Self-criticism under Leadership," News Front (May 1980), p. 7. Hsiung is editor-in-chief of Red Flag.

24. Ibid., pp. 7-8.

25. Hu, "Treat and Study Press Criticism as an Academic Question," pp. 14-15.

26. Ibid., p. 16.

27. Hu, "How to Promote Criticism and Self-criticism in the Press," p. 5. Hu was referring to the recently revised edition of the Constitution. But, the Constitution adopted during the Gang of Four's reign contained similar clauses. See "Constitution of the Communist Party of China" adopted by the Tenth National Party Congress of the Communist Party of China on August 28, 1973, in The Tenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Documents) (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1973), pp. 59-73.

28. Staff Commentator, "Dutifully Strengthen Press Criticism," News Front (March 1979), pp. 3-4.

29. White, p. 86; Hsiung, p. 5.

30. Hu, "How to Promote Criticism and Self-criticism in the Press," p. 9.

31. Staff Reporter, "Hsu Chu-cheng on Privately-owning Newspapers and Others," The Seventies, No. 131 (December 1980), pp. 44-51. Unless otherwise indicated, discussion of Wen Hui Pao is based on this Hong Kong magazine's interview with Hsu.

32. Mao Tse-tung, "Wen Hui Pao's Bourgeois Orientation Should Be Criticized, (July 1, 1957)," Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 5, pp. 451-456.

33. Ting Wang, ed., A Compilation of Press Articles on Peking's News Policy During the Cultural Revolution (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1973), passim, and pp. 127-141 in particular.

34. The Chinese press in the past several years have carried many such articles. For a brief round-up, see Leonard L. Chu. "The Chinese Press Examines Itself," The Asian Messenger, Vol. 3, No 3, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Winter 1979/Spring 1980), pp. 28-29.

35. Ting I-lan, "Remembering Teng To," News Front (February 1979), pp. 25-31. Ting is Teng's widow.

36. Chu and Chu, op. cit. Also, Staff Writer, "People's Daily and Letters from Readers," China Reconstructs, Vol. 27, No. 10 (October 1978), p. 3.

37. Commentator, "Dutifully Make Up This Lesson on the Discussion of the Criterion of Truth," Red Flag, (September 2, 1979), pp. 2-4.

38. Chang Ming-ching, "My Viewpoints on the Coverage of the 'Po Hai No. 2' Incident," News Front (October 1980), p. 13. This issue contains three articles on the coverage of the incident (pp. 8-13).

39. Hsin Wen-ping, "Newspapers Should Develop the Utmost Initiative," News Front (November 1980), p. 9. The issue devotes nine pages on this incident. As revealed, the final decision was made at the State Council, China's highest executive institution. Though the articles did not say who had made the decision, most likely it was Teng Hsiao-ping himself as it involved the dismissal of the deputy petroleum minister.

40. Lin Wei, "The Right of Criticism Should Be Protected," Wen Hui Pao (Hong Kong), November 28, 1980, p. 3.

41. Tu Chien, "Attention Must Be Paid to Letters and Visitors by the People," Red Flag (October 11, 1971), p. 3.

42. "Hsu Chu-cheng on Privately-owning Newspapers and Others," p. 47.

43. Chu and Chu, op. cit., passim.

44. "How a Criticism Letter Was Handled," "Response from the Chinese Communist Party's Honan Provincial Committee," "Response from the Party Committee of Hsin Hsing Prefecture," People's Daily, May 15, 1978, p. 4.

45. Chu and Chu, op. cit. and "People's Daily and Letters from Readers."

46. "Hsu Chu-cheng on Privately-owning Newspapers and Others," p. 47.

47. Various issues of News Front. Note that this is a monthly published by the People's Daily to provide guidelines in editorial policies for all Chinese newspapers.

48. Chu and Chu, op. cit. Inkeles, op. cit., pp. 215-222.

49. Vilfred Pareto, Treaties on General Sociology, translated by Derick Mirfin (N. Y.: Dover, 1963), p. 249. Pareto treats this at length.

50. For examples, Chang Chung-hou & Sun Shu-pei, "Peking Society of Journalism Discusses Problems of Promulgation of a Press Law," News Front (December 1980), p. 22; Fang Yen, "Objectivity, Accuracy, Fairness and Comprehensiveness Are Still Needed," News Front (May 1980), pp. 8-10; Tung Lin-chung, "Journalistic Style Needs to be Changed Greatly," News Front (January 1981), pp. 16-18. Similar articles abound in this same journal in the past few years.

51. For examples, Hsiung Fu, "On the Role and Function of the Party in the State's Life," Red Flag (May 1, 1981), pp. 2-9; Chu Ku, "Insist on Democratic Centralism," Red Flag (March 17, 1981), pp. 40-43; "Some Guidelines on Political Life within the Party - adopted at the 5th Plenum of the 11th Central Committee ofthe Chinese Communist Party," Red Flag (March 16, 1980), pp. 2-11; Sung Ping, "Party Committees Must Assume Leadership in the Newspapers," News Front (June 1980), pp. 14-16; Special Commentator, "Be a Complete Materialist," Red Flag (December 16, 1980), pp. 2-12; Wu Chiang, "Correctly Handling Contradictions within the People Is the Overall Question," Red Flag (February 2, 1979), pp. 2-7.

52. George A. Donohue, Philip J. Tichenor and Clarice N. Olien, "Gatekeeping: Mass Media Systems and Information Control," in F. Gerald Kline and Philip J. Tichenor, eds., Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research (Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage, 1972), pp. 44-47.

53. Ibid.

54. Such accounts are numerous. See also Andrew Nathan, "Mass Mobilization and Political Participation in China: Do People Believe the Media." Paper presented to the Conference on Communication and Societal Integration in China, East-West Communication Institute, The East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, January 2-7, 1979.